



Idaho Fish and Game

Bear Identification Guide

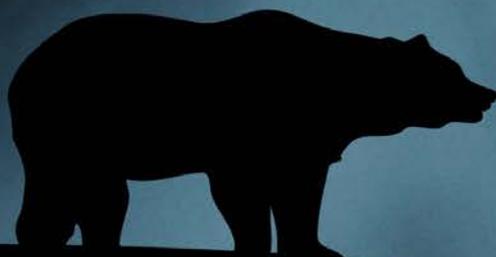


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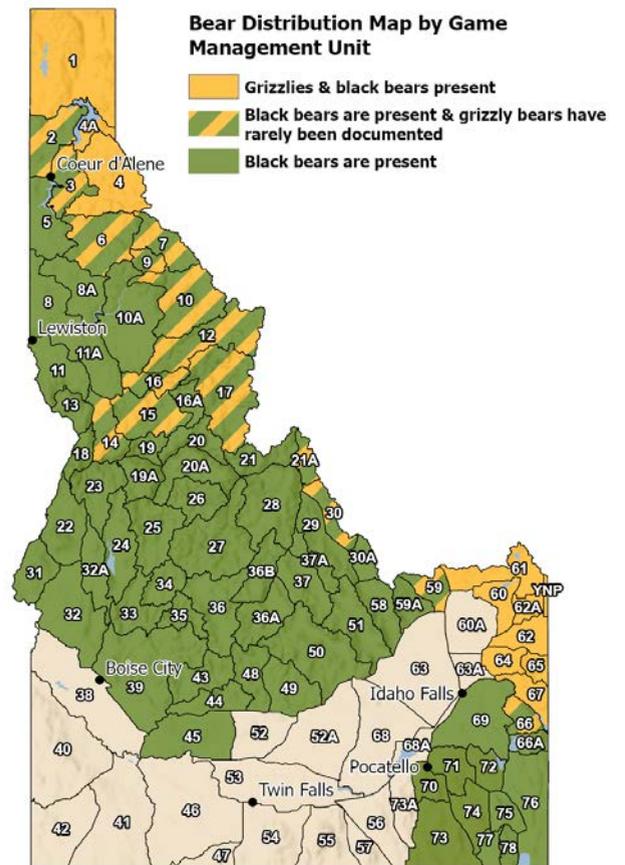
Overview-Status

Idaho is home to both black bears (*Ursus americanus*) and grizzly bears (*U. arctos*). Grizzly bears may be encountered in the Panhandle (units 1, 4, 4A) and Upper Snake Regions (units 60, 61, 62, 62A, 64, 65, and 67). Grizzly bears have also been sighted in the Clearwater and Salmon Regions, and additional portions of the Panhandle and Upper Snake Regions but sightings are rare.

Even though black bear and grizzly bear populations overlap in a small portion of Idaho, grizzly bear populations continue to expand. Overall grizzly bear numbers are low compared to black bears.

Black bears are abundant in Idaho and can be found throughout most of the state. They are classified as a big game species and management is guided by the Idaho Black Bear Management Plan.

Hunters are responsible for distinguishing between grizzly bears and black bears before shooting. Correct identification is critical because grizzly bears are listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. It is illegal to shoot or harm a grizzly bear, unless the action is in defense of your or another's life.



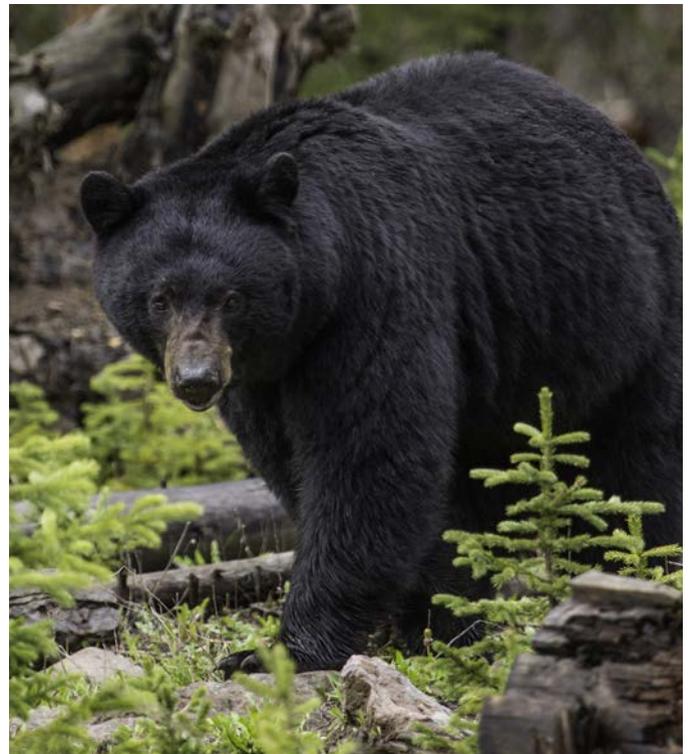
Grizzly Bear



Identification

There are multiple physical characteristics to help you determine the difference between a grizzly bear and black bear. These include the shoulder hump, face shape and profile, size and shape of the ears, and length of the claws. Hair color and body size alone are not reliable for identifying bears. In many cases, it's not possible to identify the bear based on one feature alone; therefore, you need to use as many as you can to ensure you correctly identify the bear.

Black Bear

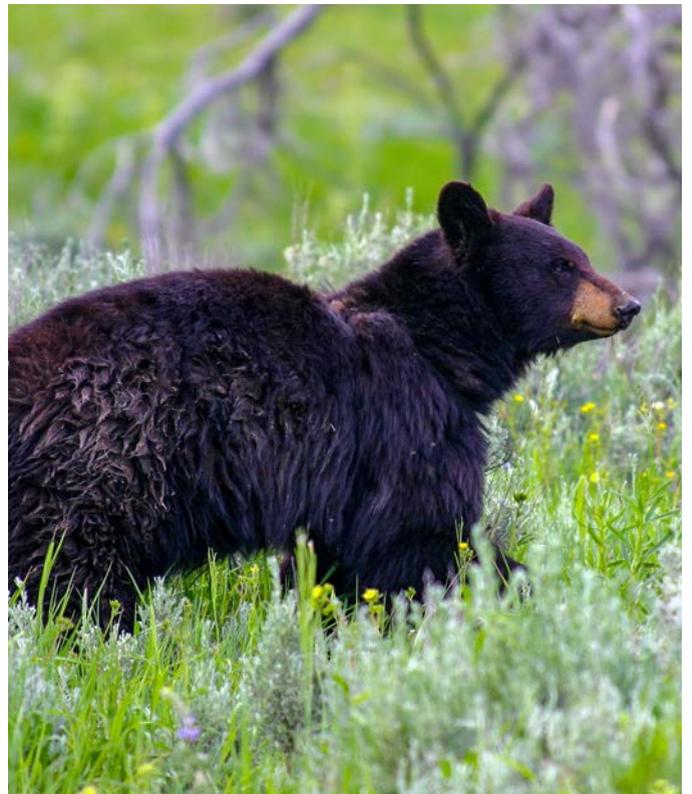
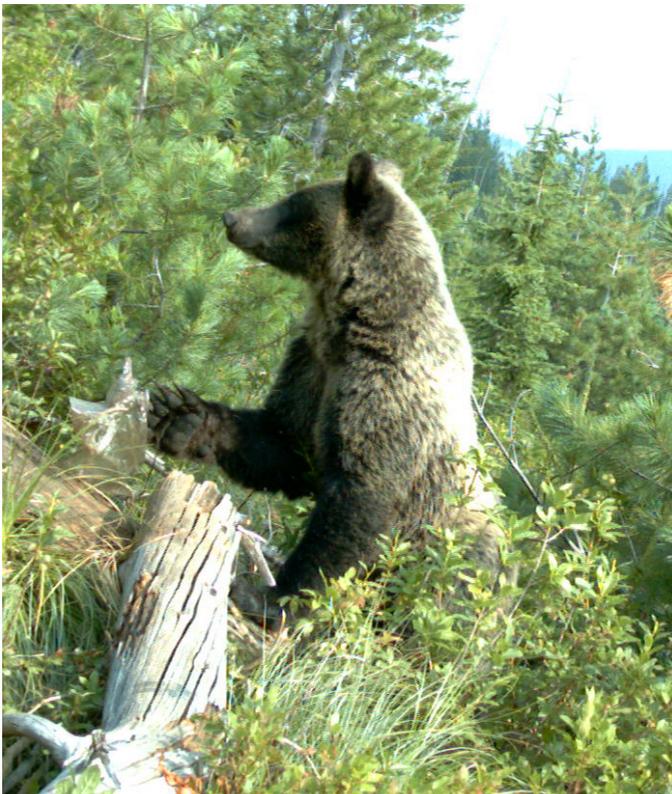
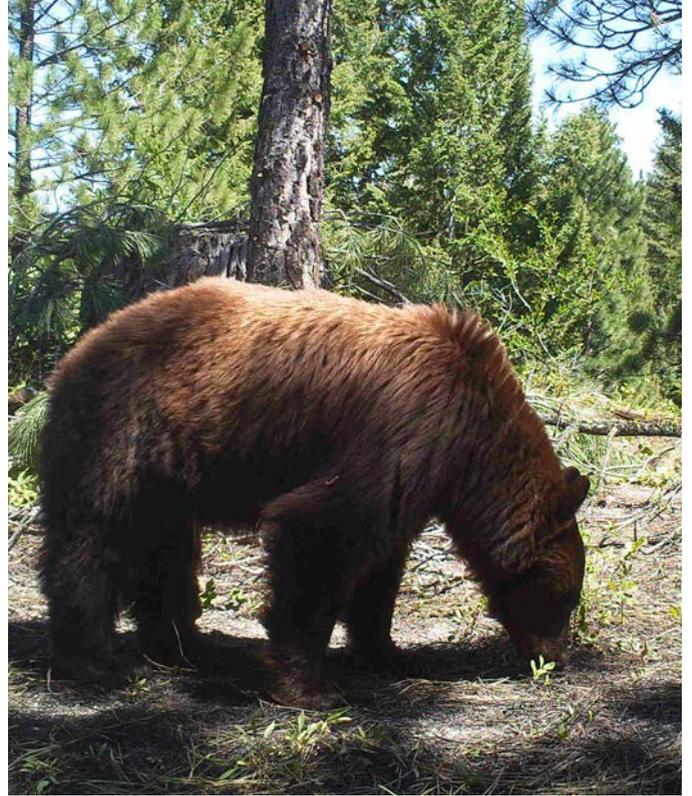


Shoulder: Grizzly bears have well-developed shoulder muscles for digging and turning over rocks when they are foraging. These muscles typically appear as a prominent shoulder hump. Black bears lack well-developed shoulder muscles and therefore typically, do not have the shoulder hump. The bear's position can affect your ability to see the hump. For example, a black bear may appear to have a hump if it's standing on a rock or log. A grizzly bear's hump may not be obvious if its head is raised above shoulder level.

 **Grizzly Bear**



 **Black Bear**



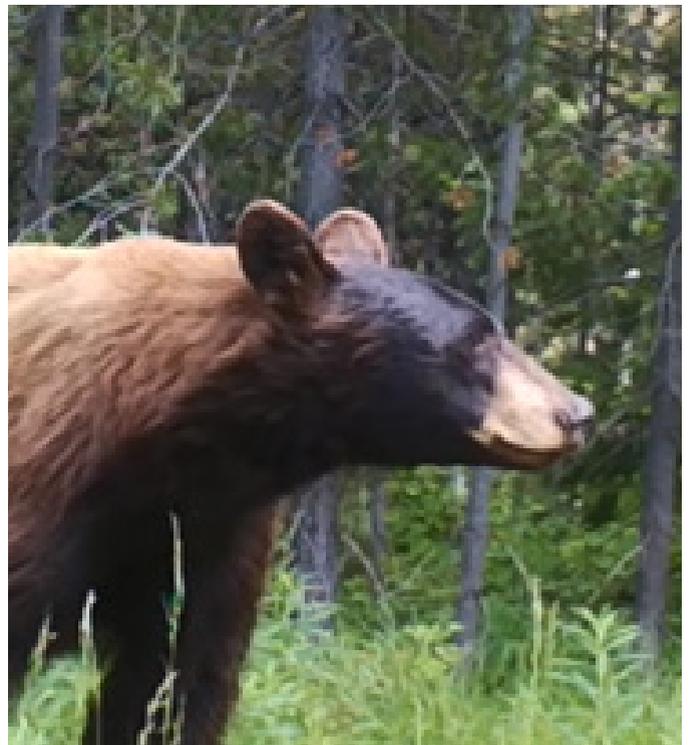
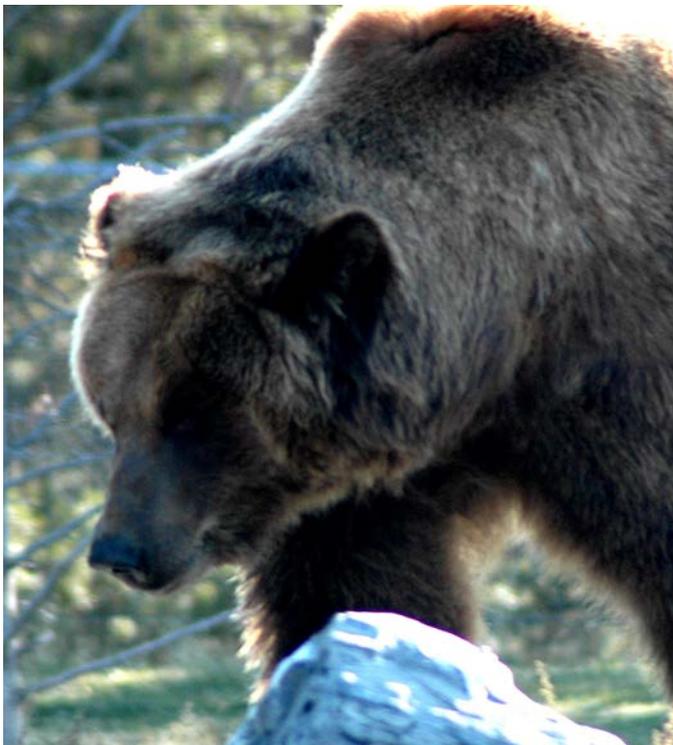
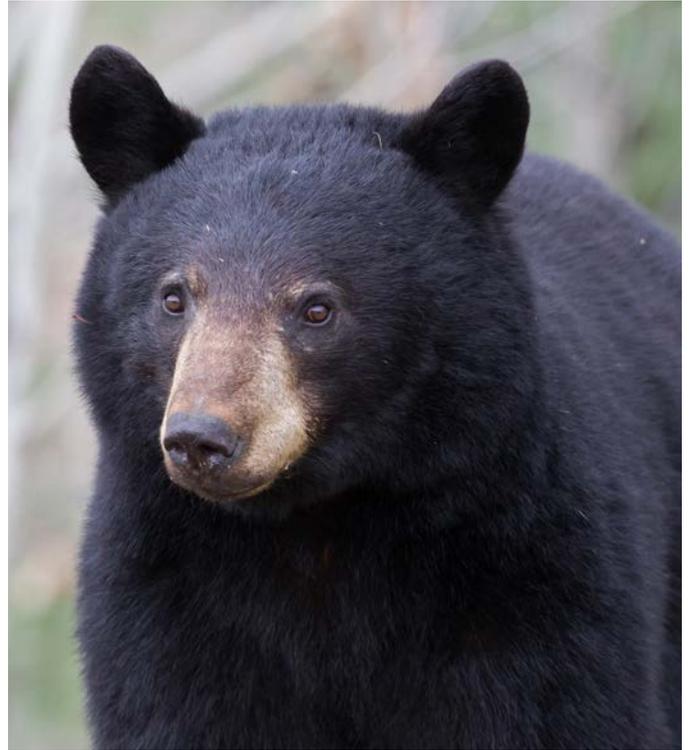
Face: The profile of the face and the shape of the snout are physical characteristics to help you identify the difference between a black bear and a grizzly bear. A side view of a grizzly bear typically shows a concave or dish-shaped profile between the eyes and the end of its nose. A side view of a black bear normally has a long, fairly straight profile from forehead to the tip of the nose. However, don't use the facial profile alone as a way to tell two bears apart, as male black bears may appear to have a square, broad face and young female grizzly bears, especially in the spring, may appear to have a narrow face. In general, when viewed straight on, the face of a grizzly bear appears dished and broad. The face and forehead of a black bear in the same view appears straight and narrow.



Grizzly Bear



Black Bear

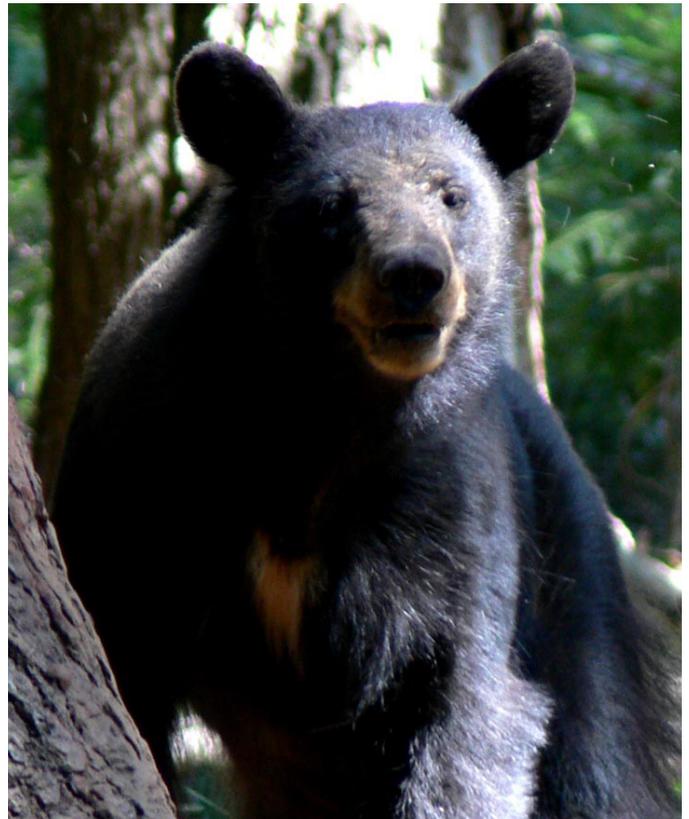


Ears: Grizzly bears tend to have shorter, more rounded ears in relation to the size of their head. Black bears tend to have ears that appear larger and more pointed. Ear size and shape is relative to the size of the head and can be a good indicator to help determine the type of bear you are looking at, but it can also take practice to make the correct call.

 **Grizzly Bear**



 **Black Bear**



Claws: Grizzly bears have front claws that are much longer than a black bear's. Grizzly claws are at least 2" long and can be more than 4" long. Grizzly bears use their claws for digging roots and ground squirrels, and for excavating dens. Black bears have front claws that are much shorter, generally less than 2" in length. Their claws are sharper and more curved than a grizzly bear's. Black bears use their claws to tear into rotten logs and stumps in search of insects and to climb trees as an escape mechanism. The front claws can be a good way to tell a grizzly bear from a black bear.

 **Grizzly Bear**



 **Black Bear**

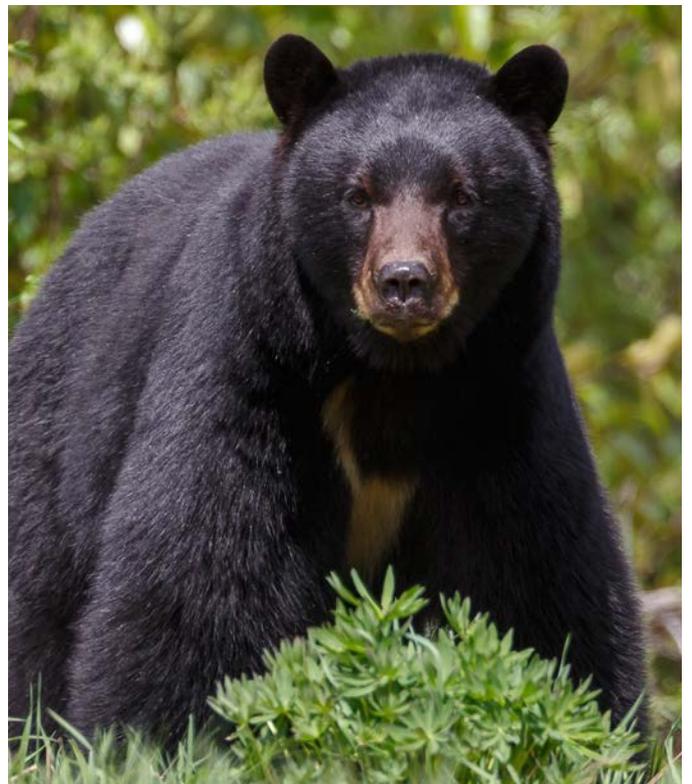


Color: Color is not a good indicator for identifying bears. Black bears can be black, brown, dark brown, blond, and cinnamon. The term “grizzly” bear comes from the lighter colored tips of the hair, often giving the bear a grizzled or silver tip look. This “look” can be used in addition to other features to help identify a bear, but grizzly bears can be anywhere from a light tan to a very dark, almost black, color.

 **Grizzly Bear**



 **Black Bear**



Size: Size is not a good indicator of the species of the bear. Sex, age, and the bear's physical condition determine size. Most people overestimate the weight of bears. A typical adult male grizzly bear weighs 350-600 lbs. and an adult female weighs 250-350 lbs. There is the potential for overlap in the size of a grizzly bear and a black bear. A typical adult male black bear can weigh as much as a female grizzly bear, and more than a sub-adult or young grizzly bear.



Grizzly Bear



Black Bear



Other Types of Identification

Be aware of the bear signs around you. These can help you determine if a grizzly or black bear is in the area. Watch for fresh tracks, signs of digging, rolled over rocks, and torn up logs.



Tracks: Environmental conditions can make track identification difficult. For example, tracks may melt out in snow or become distorted in the mud, changing the shape of the track. Also, always look for all five toes. Sometimes the last toe is not visible and can lead to confusion.

 **Grizzly Bear**



Grizzly Bear: If you take a straight edge and hold it across the front of the foot pad, the straight edge will not intersect the toes. The middle claw marks will be 2 to 4 ½" from the ends of the toe pads. The front foot of a grizzly bear appears squarer when compared to a black bear's front foot, which tends to be more rounded. The distance between the end of the toe pad and the claw marks can also be used to distinguish between the two tracks.

Scat: Grizzly bear and black bear diets overlap and scat from both species often contains partially digested insects, seeds, animal hair, and vegetation. While grizzly bear scat is usually around 2" in diameter, it's not always possible to distinguish grizzly bear from black bear scat.

 **Black Bear**



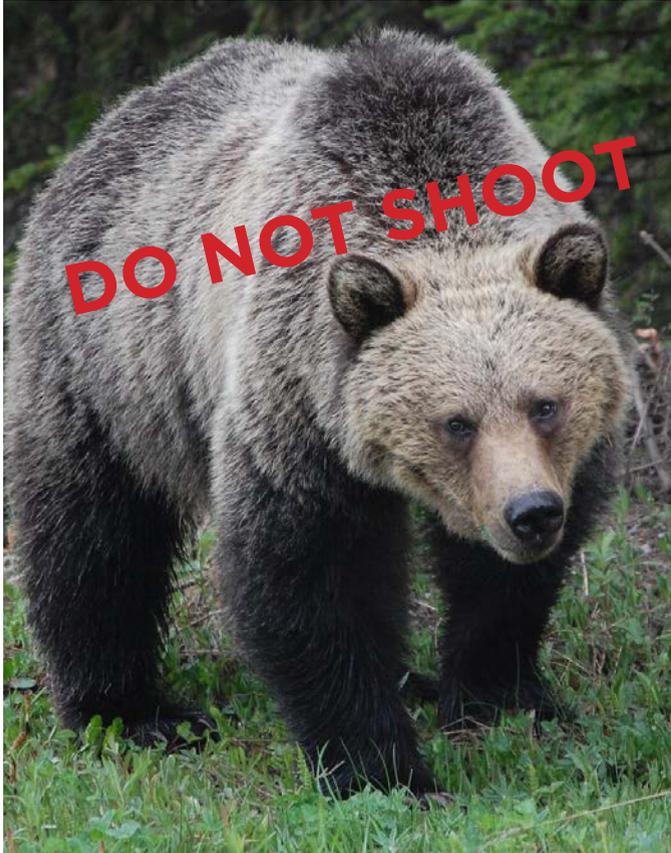
Black Bear: Because the foot is more rounded, a straight edge placed in front of the main pad will intersect the toes. The middle claw marks will be 1 to 2 ½ inches from the ends of the toe pads.



DO NOT SHOOT if you are unclear of your target:

It is illegal to kill a grizzly bear in Idaho. It is also illegal in Idaho to kill a female black bear accompanied by young. As with all other aspects of hunting, it's the responsibility of the hunter to correctly identify their target before pulling the trigger. Proper identification should include reviewing as many characteristics as possible.

Grizzly Bear



Black Bear



Report a grizzly bear observation online at idfg.idaho.gov/species/observations or to an IDFG office below:

- Panhandle Region** (208) 769-1414; 2885 Kathleen Ave., Coeur d'Alene, ID 83815
- Clearwater Region** (208) 799-5010; 3316 16th Street, Lewiston, ID 83501
- Upper Snake Region** (208) 525-7290; 4279 Commerce Circle, Idaho Falls, ID 83401
- Salmon Region** (208) 756-2271; 9 Highway 93 N, Salmon, ID 83467

More information on bear identification and how you can live and work safely with bears:

Be Bear Aware: Be Bear Aware - Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC):
igbconline.org/be-bear-aware/

BearWise: bearwise.org

Bear Wise Wyoming | Wyoming Game & Fish Department: wgfd.wyo.gov/wyoming-wildlife/large-carnivore/bear-wise-wyoming

Bears In Montana | Montana FWP: fwp.mt.gov/conservation/wildlife-management/bear/be-bear-aware